

Message Text

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TAGS: PORG, PINT, XP
SUBJECT: PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE SOUTH
PACIFIC COMMISSION

REF: SUVA 1018

SUMMARY: THE SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS ARE COMING OF POLITICAL AGE
AS EVIDENCED AT LAST MAY'S PROCEEDINGS OF THE PROGRAM AND EVAL-
UATION COMMITTEE OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION. THAT SERIES OF
MEETINGS CLEARLY INDICATED THE SIGNIFICANCE ROLE SPC HAS
PLAYED IN THIS PROCESS OF POLITICAL MATURATION, AND A GROWING
AWARENESS OF THE NEED TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES AND TO ASSESS,
CRITICALLY, THE KINDS OF ASSISTANCE WHICH IS OFFERED.

1. LAST MAY'S PROCEEDINGS OF THE PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE
MEETING AND THOSE OF THE COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
PARTICIPATING GOVERNMENTS (CRPG) AS WELL AS ENCOUNTERS WITH
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DELEGATES PASSING THROUGH SUVA, PROVIDED OPPORTUNITIES AND THE
BASIS FOR THE FOLLOWING GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON ATTITUDES AND
OUTLOOK OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC AS IT RELATES TO THE SOUTH
PACIFIC COMMISSION:

(A) A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE SPC CONTRIBUTION TO THE
OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC WHICH INCLUDES GROWTH
OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION, AWARENESS OF THE NEED TO ESTABLISH

PRIORITIES AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF AID OFFERS, IS THE FACT THAT THE SPC HAS PROVIDED OVER THE YEARS THE FORUM WHERE, INCREASINGLY, ISLAND STATES AND ENTITIES HAVE COME INTO CONTACT WITH METROPOLITAN STATES ON AN EQUAL TO EQUAL BASIS. THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTACT INCLUDES OFFICIAL SESSIONS WHERE THE PARTICIPANTS ENGAGE IN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH SOME DEGREE OF FORMALITY AS WELL AS THE INFORMAL MEETINGS OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE HALLS OR EVEN THE CORRIDORS. THE SPC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THESE CONTACTS AMONG THE ISLANDERS ACQUIRE EVEN GREATER SIGNIFICANCE IF ONE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE OFTEN UNDER-ESTIMATED DISTANCES IN THE PACIFIC AND THE OVERWHELMING PREOCCUPATION OF THE ISLANDS WITH THEIR INTERNAL PROBLEMS WHICH ARE INVARIABLY SEEN AS UNIQUE UNTIL THEY ARE CONFRONTED WITH THOSE OF THEIR NEIGHBORS.

(B) THE ISLANDERS HAVE BECOME STEADILY MORE DEMANDING OF THE SPC AND INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF ITS BUREAUCRATIC DIMENSIONS. THE ISLANDERS NO LONGER REGARD THE SPC PRONOUNCEMENTS AS FOUNTAINS OF WESTERN WISDOM THAT SHOW THE WAY TO PROSPERITY BUT AS STATEMENTS THAT MUST PASS THE TEST OF CLOSE QUESTIONING IN THE LIGHT OF THE ISLAND'S OWN EXPERIENCE.

(C) WHAT IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IS THE SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PERSUASIVENESS WITH WHICH THIS SKEPTICISM AND DEMANDS ON SPC ARE ARTICULATED. FIJI AND WESTERN SAMOA ILLUSTRATED THIS NEW TENDENCY BY THEIR DETAILED AND WELL-REASONED CRITICISM OF PAST SPC APPROACHES TO FORMULATION, SELECTION AND PRESENTATION OF FUTURE PROJECTS IN THE AREA. (SEE REFTEL AND REPORT OF P & E LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMITTEE).

(D) ONE AREA WHICH THE ISLANDS ARE INCREASINGLY SINGLE OUT FOR SPECIAL CRITICISM IS THE SPC ADMINISTRATIVE OVERHEAD AS MEASURED IN TERMS OF SALARIES PAID TO SPC EMPLOYEES. THE MOST EXTREME ARTICULATION OF THIS POINT WAS THE REMARK MADE BY THE TUVALU REPRESENTATIVE TO THE EFFECT THAT AN SPC DRIVER MAKES MORE THAN THE TUVALU CHIEF MINISTER. THIS CRITICAL VIEW OF SALARIES IS ONLY BEGINNING.

((3) ISLAND DELEGATES TOOK NOTE AND WELCOMED THE FACT THAT THE U.S. DELEGATE TO SPC WAS FOR THE FIRST TIME AN AMBASSADOR RESIDENT IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC. THEY SAW IN THIS EVIDENCE OF GENUINE U.S. INTEREST IN THE PACIFIC, BUT ALSO A HOPE OF CONTINUITY IN THE U.S. REPRESENTATION IN THE SPC AND THEREBY A PROSPECT FOR ACCUMULATION OF SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE IN THE AREA AND A MORE EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION.

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(F) SOME ISLAND DELEGATIONS DID NOT FAIL TO RAISE THE QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THE ENHANCED U.S. ROLE IN THE PACIFIC MEANS IN TERMS OF AID. THE U.S. DELEGATION TOOK EXTREME CARE TO EXPLAIN THAT LARGE-SCALE BILATERAL AID WAS NOT WHAT WE HAD IN MIND, AND THAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON REGIONAL ASSISTANCE AND ON HOW IT CAN BE EFFECTIVELY ADMINISTERED TO MEET CERTAIN PRIORITY NEEDS OF THE REGION.

(G) ALTHOUGH DECISIONS WERE MADE BY INFORMAL CONSENSUS THE FORMAL SESSIONS WERE FREQUENTLY MARKED BY SHARP DEBATE OF CONFLICTING POINTS OF VIEW USUALLY EXPRESSED WITH NOTABLE BREVITY. THE DIVISIONS OF OPINION REVEALED THROUGH THE DEBATE WERE NOT GLOSSED OVER IN THE INTEREST OF TIME OR OBSERVANCE OF WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED THE PACIFIC WAY OF DECISION MAKING.

(H) WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY "PACIFIC WAY", ESPECIALLY IN CHAIRING A COMMITTEE, HAS OCCASIONALLY BEEN EQUATED WITH ALLOCATION OF A CHAIRMAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES. THIS TYPE OF MISCONCEPTION OF THE PACIFIC WAY WAS ILLUSTRATED IN THE HANDLING OF THE P & E COMMITTEE BY THE AUSTRALIAN CHAIRMAN WHOSE APPARENT PRESUMPTION WAS THAT THE PACIFIC WAY IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE EXERCISE OF LEADERSHIP BY THE CHAIR. WHAT RESULTED FROM THIS

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PRACTICE WAS INTERMINABLE INVITATIONS TO DELEGATES TO EXPRESS VIEWS AND COMMENTS IN SOME INSTANCE EVEN AFTER AN ITEM HAD BEEN VOTED UPON AND PRESUMABLY DISPOSED OF. THIS PATERNALISTIC ABSTENTION FROM PROVIDING NORMAL LEADERSHIP BY THE CHAIR EXASPERATED EVEN THE ISLANDERS WHO FELT THE NEED FOR SOMEONE WITH INITIATIVE TO ACCELERATE THE PROCESS OF CONSENSUS

AND TO MOVE ON TO ANOTHER AGENDA ITEM.

(I) IN THE CRPG MEETING WHERE SUCH LEADERSHIP AND INITIATIVE HAS BEEN EXERCISED THE ISLAND PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED APPRECIATION AND NOTED THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME THE COMMITTEE' WORK HAS COMPLETED IN A DAY AND A HALF INSTEAD OF THE REGUL FOUR DAYS PREVIOUSLY REQUIRED. THE U.S. DELEGATION CAME AWAY WITH THE CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PACIFIC WAY EXEMPLIFIED BY THE AUSTRALIAN CHAIRMAN WAS RESENTED BY THE ISLANDERS AS BEING EITHER CONDESCENDING OR PATERNALISTIC. FURTHERMORE IT WILL BE A MISTAKE TO UNDERESTIMATE THE ISLANDERS' SOPHISTICATED UNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHAIRMAN OF A MEETING BE IT AN ISLANDER OR A REPRESENTATIVE OF A METROPOLITCAN NATION.

(J) RELATIONS AMONG THE ISLANDERS WERE SOMEWHAT LESS HARMONIOUS THAN THEIR REGIONALIST RHETORIC WOULD LEAD ONE TO BELIEVE IT IS. THE REVIEW OF THE 1979 PROGRAM REVEALED THE EXISTENCE OF PERSISTENT RIVALRIES, IF NOT JEALOUSIES, AMONG THE ISLANDS WITH REGARD TO THE AMOUNT OF AID EACH ONE RECEIVES AND ALLEGATIONS OF SPC FAVORITISM TOWARDS THE LARGER AND MORE POPULOUS ISLANDS TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE SMALLER ONES. IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT THE SPC TOOK NOTE OF THIS OPEN SENSITIVITY ON THE PART OF THE SMALLER ISLANDS AND WILL TAKE STEPS TO DISTRIBUTE AID MORE EQUITABLY.

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH RECENT PRACTICES THE PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE CONVENED AS AN AD HOC GROUP CHAIRED BY THE FIJIAN DELEGATE TO REVIEW IN DETAIL THE VARIOUS ITEMS WHICH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MADE UP THE SPC SUBMISSION OF A WORK PROGRAM FOR THE YEARS 1979 - 81. IN CONTRAST, HOWEVER, WITH PAST PRACTICE THE ISLANDS DID NOT TREAT THIS AD HOC GROUP AS AN EXCLUSIVE ISLAND DELEGATIONS COMMITTEE NOR DID THEY REQUEST, AS HAD BEEN DONE IN RECENT YEARS, THAT THE DELEGATES OF THE METROPOLITAN COUNTRIES EXCUSE THEMSELVES. ON THE CONTRARY, LAST MAY THE ISLAND DELEGATES WERE UNANIMOUS AND OUTSPOKEN IN ASKING THAT THE METROPOLITAN POWERS PARTICIPATE IN THE REVIEW OF THE PROGRAM BECAUSE, AS THEY SAID, THEY WOULD LIKE TO HAVE THE BENEFIT OF THE METROPOLITAN DELEGATES' EXPERIENCE.

3. THE U.S. DELEGATION PLAYED A ROLE IN THIS CHANGE OF ATTITUDE BY THE ISLANDERS BECAUSE EARLY IN THE SESSION IN NOUMEA IT LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THERE WAS NO BASIS (LEGAL OR OTHER) FOR THE CONCEPT OF AN EXCLUSIVE ISLAND AD HOC GROUP MEETING SEPARATELY TO REVIEW METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENTS THAT THE PROPOSED SPC PROGRAM BE REVIEWED BY THE ENTIRE P & E COMMITTEE. THE RESULT WAS HARMONIOUS ATMOSPHERE IN THE PROGRAM AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE AS FAR AS THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ISLANDS AND METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENTS GO.

4. CONCLUSION. THE FOREGOING SUGGEST ONLY ONE: THE
SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS ARE COMING OF POLITICAL AGE.
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